

RUSSELL BEGAYE PRESIDENT IONATHAN NEZ VICE PRESIDENT

Communications Office Office of the President and Vice President Mihio Manus Michele J. Crank 928.871.7000

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President Begaye Addresses Oxford Union and Discusses Native Sovereignty

On Tuesday, Oct. 25, Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye addressed the Oxford Union, a speaking and debating society at Oxford University in Oxford, England.

The Oxford Union has hosted world leaders in virtually every field and President Begaye was the first Native American leader to address this group.

The Oxford Union often focuses on international political discourse. However, there is little international discussion about U.S. actions and policy towards its own Native American people.

President Begaye focused on the Navajo Nation's relationship with the federal government and the need to bring this relationship into the 21st century by acknowledging true Native American sovereignty.

In his speech, the president addressed the injustices of the Long Walk and termination-era policies toward Native Americans and also the problems stemming from the assimilation and boarding school era. He also talked about how these two eras of U.S. federal-Indian policy were a direct product of colonialism.

President Begaye also highlighted recent advances in integrating cultural learning into Navajo schools that are now teaching Diné language. Two generations earlier the same schools would regularly wash Navajo children's mouths with soap for speaking their language.

"We are sovereign not because of what outsiders say. We are sovereign because we believe and say we are. Outsiders can take everything else, our land, our jurisdiction, and even try to



In his speech, President Begaye reiterated that sovereignty cannot be taken away from Native Americans because it comes from within. "Sovereignty is in our hearts and minds," he told the Oxford Union.

take our culture," he said. "But they cannot take that mindset from us. Because sovereignty is in our hearts and minds. Sovereignty does not come from external sources. It comes from within."

During the question and answer period President Begaye discussed his opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline, his stance on the Washington football team name and his recent endorsement of Hillary Clinton for President of the United States.

The speech will be available later on the Oxford Union YouTube channel.

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